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Birds of a Texan Winter.

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not discreditable to us, particularly when taking into consideration the bleats and baas and whimpering laggardness with which we returned from three-mile excursions during the first few days we were in the tramping-line. By degrees we thus explored the whole country within a radius of seven miles of Ethel. With this we were content, yea, even proud; for did not many of our boating women-neighbors grumble even at their walk to the river and declare they would rather row five miles than walk one? We were proud, for we knew every church, every picturesque cottage and ruin, within our radius, while our aquatic friends knew only those bordering the river. We were proud—until, ah me! until that desolate day when a merrily, merrily flying squad swooped down upon us and declared they had 'cycled every inch of the *twenty-mile* periphery of which Ethel's neighboring church tower was the centre!

That cutting down of our pedal pride resulted in our subscribing to a daily paper. Every morning before stretching out to our regular day's tramp we had been wont to trot through dewy lanes, over stiles, and across subtly-colored turnip- and cabbage-fields, to purchase in the town of M—a luxury not to be had in our own hamlet,—the "Daily News." Rain or shine, that trot must be trotted, for there were those among us who would have tramped sulkily all day and sniffed the sniff of wrath at ivied church and thatched cottage were the acid of their natures not made frothy and light by the alkali of their morning paper. It had never occurred to us, not even when we camped beneath wayside shade around our sandwiches and ale or in some stiff and dim inn-parlor and listened to the reading of the "News," that in reality the town of M—, and not the brickhood of Ethel, was thus the centre of all our ambulatory circumferences. It had never before dawned upon us that we thus added three uncounted miles to our fourteen diurnally counted ones. What astonishment at our own pedometric weakness of calculation! What disgust to find our

periphery thus three whole miles smaller than it need have been!

The next day we subscribed to the "News," and walked nine miles as the bee flies from the front door of Ethel even unto the ruins of Medmenham. And we vowed by all our plaster gods and painted goddesses that another summer we would tramp no more. We would 'cycle.

A mile away from Ethel is the village proper of Cookham. It is a sleepy town, save in the boating-season; and whoever enters the post-office in any season finds it empty and inhospitable. Raps upon a tightly-closed inner door call a woman attendant from rattling sewing or noisy gossip of the invisible penetralia; and as soon as the business is done the inhospitable door swings shut again in the stranger's face.

Cookham houses are quaint, often timbered, frequently ivy-grown from basement to roof. One imagines them assuming a half-sullen air at this yearly breaking of their dreamy repose by incursions of parti-colored hordes for whom life seems to hold but two supreme objects,—boats and pictures.

The most picturesque feature of the place is the old church, set amid tombs whose mossy and time-gnawed cherubs have exchanged grins for two hundred years and more. The old flint tower is grave and grim, but softened by a wonderful centuries old ivy in a veil of living green. A pathetic interest to artists hallows the venerable church-yard. Here sleeps Frederick Walker, a genius cut off before his meridian, and resting now amid his kindred in a lowly grave, over which the Thames waters surge every spring, leaving the grave all the rest of the year the sadder for its cold soddenness and for the humid mildew and decay eating already into the headstone, as yet but twelve years old. In the church itself is Thorneycroft's mural tablet to the dead artist, a portrait head of him who was born almost within the old church's shadow, and whose pencil dealt always so lovingly with the poetic aspects of his native region.

MARGARET BERTHA WRIGHT.

BIRDS OF A TEXAN WINTER.

WHITE of Selborne was, on the whole, tolerably content to plunge his swallows, or a good proportion of them, into the mud and deposit them for the winter at the bottom of a pond. Professionally conservative, as a fine old Church-of-England clergyman, though constitutionally sceptical, as became one of the earliest of really observant naturalists, he was loath to break flatly with the consensus of contemporary opinion, rustic and philosophic, and found a *modus vivendi* in the theory that a great many, perhaps a majority, of the swifts and barn-swallows did go to Africa. He had seen them organizing their emigration-parties and holding noisy debate over the best time to start and the best route to take. The sea-part of the travel was of trifling length, and baiting-places were plenty in France, Spain, and Italy. Sometimes, such was their power of wing, they were known to take the outside route and strike boldly across the Bay of Biscay, for they had alighted on vessels. Probably the worthy old man was reluctant to wrench from the rural mind a harmless remnant of superstition,—if superstition it might be called, in view of the fact that sundry saurians and chelonians, held by classifiers to be superior in rank to birds, do hibernate under water, and that, more marvellous than all, the quarrymen of his day, like those of ours, insisted that living frogs occasionally sprang from under their chisel, leaving an unchallengeable impress in the immemorial rock. It must indeed have been up-hill work to extinguish the old belief in the minds of men who had seen the water-ouzel pattering in perfect ease and comfort along the floor of the pellucid pool, and who had heard from their fisher friends from the north coast of the gannets that were drawn up in the herring-nets.

Most of us, even *color' chi sanno*, like to retain a spice of mystery in our

mental food. It may constitute no part of the nutriment, and may often be deleterious, but it meets a want, somehow or other, and wants, however undefinable, must be recognized. It is a spur that titillates the absorbent surfaces and helps to keep them in action. It is a craving that the race is never going to outlive, and that will afford occupation and subsistence to a considerable class of its most intelligent and respectable members until the year one million, as it has done since the year one. The great mass of us like to see the absolute reign of reason tempered by the incomprehensible, and are ever ready to lend a kindly ear to men and things that humor that liking.

Where do all the birds, myriads in number and scores in species, go when they leave the North in the winter? A small minority lags, not superfluous, for we are delighted to have them, but in a subdued, pinched, and hand-to-mouth mode of existence in marked contrast to their summer life and perceptibly marring the pleasure of their society. They flock around our homes and assume a mendicant air that is a little depressing. Unlike the featherless tramps, they pay very well for their dole; but we should prefer them, as we do our other friends, to be independent, and that although we know they are but winter friends and will coolly turn their backs upon us as soon as the weather permits. The spryest and least dependent of them all, the snow-bird, who sports perpetual full dress, jerks at us his expressive tail and is off at the first thaw, black coat, white vest, and all. No tropics or subtropics for him. He can stand our climate and our company with a certain condescending tolerance so long as we keep the temperature not too much above zero, but grows contemptuous when Fahrenheit grows effeminate and forty. Nothing for it then but to cool off his thin and unprotected legs and

toes in the snows of Canada. "The white North hath his" heart. Our winter is his summer. There is nothing in his anatomy to explain this idiosyncrasy. His physical construction closely resembles that of his insessorial brethren, most of whom go when he comes. He has no discoverable provision against cold. Adaptation to environment does not seem to cover his case. It does not cover his legs. They remain unfeathered. We shudder to see his translucent little tarsi on top of the snow, which he obviously prefers as a stand-point to bare spots where the snow has been blown away. Compared with the ptarmigan and the snowy owl, or even the ruffed grouse, all so well blanketed, he suggests a survival of the unfittest.

The movements of this tough little anti-Darwinian are overlapped by the bluebird and the robin,—our robin, best entitled to the name, inasmuch as it is accorded him by fifty-odd millions against thirty millions who give it to the redbreast,—who are usually with him long before he gets away. They never move very far southward, but watch the cantonments of Frost, ready to advance the moment his outposts are drawn in and signs appear of evacuation. Their climate, indeed, is determined in winter rather by altitude than by latitude. The low swamps and pineries that skirt tide-water in the Middle States furnish them a retreat. Thence they scatter themselves over the tertiary plain as it widens southward beneath the granite bench that divides all the great rivers south of the Hudson into an upper and a lower reach. Detachments of them extend their tour to the Gulf. Readers of "A Subaltern on the Campaign of New Orleans in 1814-15" will recall his mention of the assemblage of robins hopping over the Chalmette sward that were the first living inhabitants to welcome the weary invaders on emerging from the palmetto marshes. They can hardly be said to reach the particular region of which we propose to speak, both species, the bluebird especially, being almost strangers to it.

Other species, the cardinal grosbeak among them, may be said to stop, as it were, just out of hearing, the echo of their song slumbering in the thin, keen air, ready to swell again into unmistakable reality. Between these stubborn fugitives and those who follow the butterflies to the tropics there is a wide variety in the extent of travel in which our winged compatriots indulge.

Quadrupeds, whose movements are less speedy and more limited, have to adapt themselves to the Northern winter as best they may. Hard and long training has made them less the creatures of climate than their feathered associates, who might themselves in many cases have learned perforce to stay where they were reared but for possessing the light and agile wings which woo them to wander. We may fancy Bruin, with his passion for sweet mast and luscious fruits, eying with envy the martin and the wild fowl as they sweep over his head to the teeming Southland, and wondering, as he huddles shivering into his snowy lair, why Nature should be so partial in her gifts. The call of the trumpeting swan, the bugler crane, and the Canada goose falls idly upon his ear. To their breezy challenge, "A new home,—who'll follow?" he cannot respond.

Let us join this tide of travel and move sunward with some of those who take through-tickets. We can easily keep up with them now. Steam is not slower than wings,—often faster. Sitting at ease, yet moved by iron muscles, we can time the coursers of the air. A few decades ago, when this familiar motor was a new thing comparatively, we could not do so. At the jog of twenty miles an hour, even the sparrow could pass us on a short stretch, and the dawdling crow soon left us in the rear. Our gain upon their time is so recent that the birds have not yet fully realized it. Unaccustomed to being beaten by anything *on earth*, they will skim along abreast of a train till, to their unspeakable, or at least unspoken, wonderment, they find that what they are fleeing from is fleeing from them.

One morning last winter I was speeding eastward to the Crescent City, the freshest of my memories a struggle at Houston with one of those breakfasts which so atrociously distinguish the reign of the magnate who is said to supply under contract all the meals of the Southern railway-restaurants, and who, "if ever fondest prayer for others' woe avail on high," will certainly be booked, with the vote of some of his victims, for a post-mundane berth a good deal warmer than his coffee and more sulphurous than his eggs. Afar off to the right the sun was rounding up from the Gulf and clearing the haze from his broad, red face, the better to look abroad over the glistening prairie and see if the silhouetted pines and cattle were where he had left them the day before. Glancing to the left, which was my side of the car, I became aware of a large bird suspended in the air, not motionless, for his wings were doing their best, but to all appearance as stationary as the scattered trees and cattle, and about fifteen yards distant. Every feature and marking of the "chicken," or pinnated grouse, was as distinct to the eye as though, instead of making thirty-two miles an hour, he were posing for his photograph. For full two hundred yards he sustained the race, until, finding that his competitor had the better wind, he gave it up and shot suddenly into the sedge. How much longer the match had lasted I could not say. He must have got up near the engine—of course losing some time in the act of rising—and fallen back gradually to my place, which was in a rear car. But when a schedule for birds comes to be framed, it is safe to set down *Tetrao cupido* at about the speed above named. Timed from a rail-car, that is; for, looked at over a gun, he seems to move five times as fast. The double-barrel is a powerful binocular.

Steam, then, soon carries us to the resort of the lost truants, who have travelled with the lines of longitude by guides and tracks over that invisible road as unerring as those of the railway. We shall find them in close companionship with friends unknown in our

latitude, whose abiding-places are at the South, as those left behind are fixed dwellers at the North.

From the window at which I sit on this morning late in January and this parallel of thirty degrees,—window open, as well as the door, for no norther is on duty to-day,—I see flocks of our familiar redwings, cowbirds, and blackbirds, all mingled together as though the hard and fast lines of species had been obliterated and made as meaningless as the concededly evanescent shades of variety, trooping busily over the lawn and blackening the leafless China-trees. But they have a crony never seen by us. This is the crow-blackbird of the South, or jackdaw as it is wrongly called, otherwise known as the boat-tailed grackle, from his over-allowance of rudder that pulls him sideways and ruins his dead-reckoning when a wind is on. His wife is a sober-looking lady in a suit of steel-gray, and the pair are quite conspicuous among their winter guests. The latter are far less shy than we are accustomed to find them, a majority being young in their first season and with little or no experience of human guile. No one cares to shoot them, in the abundance of larger game, and the absence of stones from the fat prairie-soil places them out of danger from the small boy. Their only foe is the hawk, who levies blackmail on them as coolly and regularly as any other plumed cateran. Partly, perhaps, by reason of this outside pressure, they are cheek by jowl with the poultry,—the cow-bunting, which is the pet prey of the hawk, following them into the back porch and insisting sometimes on breakfasting with Tray,—or rather with Legion, for that is the name of the Texas dog. In this familiarity they are approached, though not equalled, by that more home-staying bird the meadow-lark, who is here a dweller of the lawn and garden and adds his mellow whistle to the orchestra of the mocking-bird. This so-called lark is classed by most naturalists among the starlings, as are two of the blackbirds, which two he resembles in some of his habits, but not in migrating, being about as much of a continental as

any other biped American. Nor is he like his cousins in changes of dress. Out of a dozen of the latter that may be brought down at a shot, you will scarcely find three exactly alike. They moult at the South, and the young pass gradually into adult plumage. The male redwing, up to his first autumn, is hardly distinguishable in dress from his mother. Here he dons his epaulettes, beginning with the threadbare worsted yellow of the private, and rising in grade to the rich scarlet and gold of the officer fully commissioned to flame upon the marsh and carry havoc among its humblest inhabitants.

A month or two hence, the plover, as shy in his Northern haunts as the lark, will, in three species, be as much at home upon the lawn. Youth and inexperience must, as in the case of the other birds, be one explanation of this unwonted familiarity. Among other reasons is the abundance of food, under a mild sky, with but rare frosts to bind the earth and no snows to cover it. The temperature of an average winter day is 60° or 65° . A norther is apt to blow three or four times in the season, and it brings the mercury down to freezing-point or some degrees lower. After the two or three days of its duration, the first warm morning covers the walks and most other bare parts of the soil with worm-casts,—revealing the larders of the smaller birds. At an average, too, of four or five places in an acre one notices a hillock two or three feet in diameter tipped with a yellowish spot that deepens into orange and broadens as the air grows warm. These erections are the work of ants, the emergence of which intelligent insects in greater or less numbers, according to the temperature, causes the coloring which we observe. Intelligent we cannot help terming a creature so remarkable in its various species for the evidences of calculation furnished by its habits of life,—evidences nowhere better worth studying than among the leaf-cutting, slave-holding, and shade-planting ants of Texas; but we are sometimes tempted to deny the character to this particular species when we perceive

the utter indifference to safety with which it selects a site for its communistic abode. One of these is located in the middle of the principal (sandy and unpaved) street of a village, within twenty steps of the railroad-track, and subject to the impact of wheels and mule-, ox-, or horse-hoof many times an hour; yet the semblance of a dwelling is maintained, and the little tawny cloud comes up smiling whenever the sun allows, asking no other permission. These ant-hills, I am persuaded, supply a foundation to certain tufts of low trees which spring up in dampish places where the spring fires have less sweep. The hillocks are well drained, as appears from their composition of clear gravel, a material of which you will find more in one of them than on a surface of many feet around; and you may see the sweeter grasses gradually mantling them, these being followed by herbage of larger growth, which, accumulating humors at their roots, burgeon into arborescence, until, one vegetable entity shouldered into substance and thrift by another, the nucleus built by our tiny red friends has broadened into a tree-clad knoll. The mezquit, not many years ago confined for the most part to the arid region beyond the Nueces, is spreading eastward, and the clumps of it which begin to skirt the original copses here may be supposed to owe their first foothold to the ant. This humble promoter of forestry is duly appreciated, if only as a viand, by his neighbors. Full-grown, and still more in the larval stage, he is esteemed by them as both a toothsome and a beak-some bit. He—or, more numerously, she, if we insist on sex and decline the more practically correct *it*—forms thus the lowest term in an ascending series of animal life that grows out of the ant-hill like the tree. So much may one such settlement in a rood of ground do for the maintenance of organic existence.

A still more diffused, perhaps, if less productive, source of life exists in another burrower and mound-builder, the crawfish. Unlike the ant, which likes

to drain, he is an advocate of irrigation. In this art he can give our well-diggers odds in the game. His genius for striking water is wonderful. On the driest parts of the prairie, miles from any permanent stream, his ejections of mud may be found. Shallow or deep, his borings always reach water. He is always at home, but less accessible to callers than the ant. To the smaller birds he is forbidden fruit. In wet weather, when his vestibule is shallow, the sand-hill crane may burglarize him, or even get a snap judgment on him at the front door. The bill of the great curlew cannot be sent in so effectively, not being so rightly drawn; but that bird, more common in the season than anywhere else away from the coast, finds plenty of other food. He is not here in the winter. His place just now is filled by the jacksnipe, which flutters up from every boggy place and comes to bag in a condition anything but suggestive of short commons. The snipe's terrestrial surface lies two and a half inches beneath ours. At that distance he strikes hard pan; but it is margin enough for his operations, and he is not often caught among the shorts. Gourmands assure us that he lives "by suction," and that there is consequently no harm in eating his trail. There is comfort in this creed, whatever may be our private belief in the substantiality of what the bird absorbs; and we cheerfully eat, after the suggestion of Paul, "asking no questions," the while tacitly assuring ourselves, like old Fuller with the strawberry, that a better bird might doubtless have been made, but as certainly never was. For game flavor not even the partridge (Bob White), also exceptionally abundant here, is his superior.

But think, ye snow-bound, of the state of things implied in this embarrassment of riches,—of a mid-winter table balanced between such a choice, or, better, balanced by the adoption of both, one at each end! Nor would this be near telling the whole story. Excluding fur and sticking to feather, we have a wide range beyond. The larger birds we may begin on, very moderately,

with crane-steak, a transverse section of our stately but distant friend the sand-hill. That is the form in which he is thought to appear to best advantage. By the time you have circumvented him by circumscribing him in the gradually narrowing circuit of a buggy,—for stalking him, unless in higher grass than is common at this season, is but vexation of spirit,—you will feel vicious enough to eat him in any shape. His brother, the beautiful white bugler, you will hardly meet at dinner, he being the shyest of his kind. A Canada goose—not the tough and fishy bird of the Northern coast, but grain- and grass-fed from fledging-time—is tender, delicate, and everyway presentable. From the back upper gallery that looks upon the prairie you are likely to see a company or battalion of his brethren, their long black necks and white ties "dressing" capitally in line, and their invisible legs doing the goose-step as the inventors of that classic manoeuvre ought to do it. This bird seems to affect the *militaire* in all his movements. What can be more regular than the wedge, like that so common in tactical history, in which he begins his march, moving in "a column of attack upon the pole"? Even when startled and put to flight, he goes off smoothly and quietly, company-front. In foraging he is strictly systematic, and never forgets to set sentinels. We cannot fail to respect him while doing him the last honors. Of not inferior claim is his prairie chum and remote cousin the mallard. They are not often in close companionship, though I have seen a dozen and a half of each rise from the border and the bosom of a pond forty yards across,—one loving the open, and the other taking repose, if not food, upon the water. That there should be ponds upon these prairies is as striking to one accustomed to hill and dale as that so unpromising a surface should so teem with life. The prairie is as flat as if cast like plate-glass and rolled out,—only the table is slightly tilted toward the Gulf at the rate of two or three hundred feet in a hundred miles. At night you may see the head-

light of an engine fifteen miles away, like a low star that you wonder does not rise. It grows slowly in size, a Sirius, a Venus, a moon, as though the earth had stopped rotating and adopted a direct motion toward the heavenly bodies. Early on fine mornings the horizon gets tired, as it were, of being suppressed, and looms up in a mirage, with an outfit of imaged trees and hills reflected in an imaginary lake,—a pictured protest of Nature against monotony. There are local depressions, nevertheless, which you would not believe in but for the shallow little ponds which fill them and which are indicated from a distance at this season by the lead-colored grass that veils them and conceals their glitter. And there are longer swells, begotten of drainage, sometimes of eight or ten feet in a mile, which deceive you, as you advance, into the expectation of a grand prospect when once you shall have got to the top of them. That, practically, you never do. Arrived at what seems to be the crest of a ridge, you see nothing but more flat. The eye, in despair, gives, when you come in sight of it, an inclination to the water. The pond-surface ceases to be horizontal. The principle of gravitation stands contradicted point-blank.

The most frequent vedette of these miniature lakes is the heron,—usually the blue, sometimes the larger white, the latter a most beautiful bird. Yet neither is common. Still rarer in such situations is the bittern, the Timon of birds, the rushes being seldom high enough to afford him the strict concealment he likes. The mallard has to be his own sentinel, as a rule. He does not depend on these ponds for food, and, like other wild creatures, he reserves his chief vigilance for feeding-time. They are places of repose, at mid-day and at night, for the ducks of this and two or three other species, notably the blue- and green-winged teal, which at other times haunt the clumps of oak and pecan that skirt the sparse streams and their summer-dry affluents, where nuts and acorns in great variety, those of the live-oak being very sweet, supply unfailing winter

provision. The thickets of ilex that shade off these wooded reaches into the treeless prairie are the resort of many partridges. You are led back into the open ground by another game-bird, the pinnated grouse, the widest ranger of its genus, but at the North disappearing only less rapidly than the buffalo. As yet his most destructive foe in this region is perhaps the hawk, although he is raided from the timber by the opossum, raccoon, and three species of cat, while on the open his nest has marked attractions for the skunk and probably the coyote. He has survived these dumb discouragers so long, and the heat at his proper season is so trying to his human foe, that he may long find a refuge here and proudly lead forth his young Texans for scores of Augusts. He and his family will often quietly walk off while the panting pointer seeks the shade of the wagon and the gunner cools off under the heavy felt sombrero that is here found to be the best head-gear for summer. A very moderate game-law, well executed, would sustain this fine bird indefinitely in the struggle for existence. But law of any kind seems a foreign idea on these sea-like primeval plains. It is like thinking of a parliament in the Pleiocene, or of a court-house on the Grand Banks.

Any transcendentalist who wishes to furbish up his philosophic furniture will find this a good workshop for the purpose. There is ample room for any school, positive or negative,—plenty of cloud-land for all conceits. Kant could have picked up pure reason among the crowds of simply reasoning creatures who have possessed the scene since long before the brain of man was created. Covies of immemorial Thoreaus bivouac under those hazy woods, and pre-glacial Emersons are circling overhead. The problem of successfully living they have all solved. What more have any of us done? The greatest good of the greatest number they unpresumptuously display as a practically triumphant principle; and the greatest number is not by any means with them, any more than with us, number one. Had it been, they would all

have been extinct long ago. Nature may be "red with tooth and claw," but not suicidally so. It is to quite a peaceable, if not wholly loving, world that she invites us. And just here we can see so much of it; we can study it so broadly and so freely. Concord and Walden dwindle into the microscopic. It was under precisely such a sun as this, in a warm, dry atmosphere, on a nearly treeless soil, that the Stagyrte did all the thinking of sixty generations. Could he have done it in an overcoat and muffler, with a chronic catarrh?

If, impatient of a host of inarticulate instructors, we prefer communing with our kind and falling back on human story, some of that, too, is at hand. Half a century ago, to a year, a short string of forlorn and forlorn-looking people crossed the prairie close by, from west to east, from the Colorado to the Brazos. The head of it was Sam Houston's "army," three or four hundred strong, with all its *matériel* in one wagon. The rest consisted of the *débris* of all the Anglo-American settlements, women, children, cows, and what poor household stuff could be moved. Slowly ferrying the Brazos, and as slowly making its way down the left bank, picking up as it went the rest of the homesteads and some more fighting-men, it turned to the right at the head of the estuary. Then the little column, strengthened with some sea-borne supplies and relieved of its wards, turned to face its pursuers. These were twice its numbers, with four or five thousand reserves some days behind. Generalship was given the go-by on both sides, the *cul-de-sac* of San Jacinto being closed at both ends. Thirty minutes of noise and smoke, and the empire of Cortez and Montezuma was split in two. Clio nibbed another quill, steel pens not having then been invented. The gray geese who might have supplied it recomposed themselves on the prairie, and all the rest of their feathered friends followed their example, as the military interlude melted away and left them their ancient solitary reign.

Of the feathered spectators of the

scene we have episodically glanced at, the most interested were those constant supervisors, the vultures. Of these there are three species, one of which—the Mexican vulture—is but an occasional visitor. The other two—the black vulture and the turkey-buzzard—are monopolists in their peculiar line. They constitute here, as generally throughout the warmer parts of the continent and its islands, the recognized sanitary police. No law protects them, but they do not need it. They are too useful not to command that popular sympathy which is the higher law. The flocks and herds upon a thousand plains are theirs. Every norther that freezes and every drought that starves some of the wandering cattle and sheep brings to them provision. The railroads also, not less than the winds of heaven, are their friends, the fatal cow-catcher being an ever-busy caterer. The buzzards are, of course, under such circumstances, warm advocates of internal improvement and welcome the opening of every new railway. Their ardor in this respect, however, has of late years been damped by the building of wire fences along the track, an interference with vested rights and an assault upon the hoary claims of infant industries against which in their solemn assemblies they doubtless often condole with each other. Unfortunately for their cause, they cannot lobby.

Somehow, there seems to be always a wag or clown among each group of animals,—some one species in which the amusing or the grotesque is prominent. Among these clownish fellows I should class the black vulture, or john-crow. He is not a crow at all, but gets that name probably because so historic a tribe as *Corvus* must have some representative, and the real crow, so common at the North, is one of the few birds that are not much seen in this quarter. John unites in his ways at once fuss and business. He alternates oddly between bustle and gravity. Seated stately and motionless for hours on a leafless tree, he will suddenly, as if struck by a new idea, start off on a tour that might

have been dictated by telegram. He does not sail and circle like his friend and comrade, never being distracted by soaring pretensions, but goes straight to his object. His flight is a regular succession of short flaps, with quiescent intervals between the series. The flaps are usually four, sometimes five or six. I am sure he counts them. You have seen a pursy gentleman in black hurrying along the street and tapping his boot with a cane, as though keeping time. Fancy this gentleman in the air, dressed in feathers, his coat-skirt sheared off alarmingly short and square, and looking like a cherub in jet, all head and wings,—although John is not exactly a cherub in his habits. A white spot on each wing adds a bit of the harlequin to his style.

Were I to seek a "funny man" among the quadrupeds, I should name another dweller of the Southwestern prairies, the jack-rabbit,—John II. let us call him. Nobody ever gets quite accustomed to the preternatural ears of this hare. In proportion they are to those of others of the *Leporidae* nearly what the ears of the mule are to those of the horse. When this bit of bad drawing, as big as a fawn and weighing ten pounds or so, jumps up before you and bounds away at railroad speed, he makes you rub your eyes. You expect the apparition to disappear like other apparitions, especially as it moves off with vast rapidity. But it does not. As suddenly as it started it is transformed into a prong like an immense letter V, projecting in perfect stillness from the grass a hundred yards off. You advance, and the same proceeding is repeated. Jack is obviously deep in guns, and knows the difference in power between a muzzle- and a breech-loader, if he has not ascertained, indeed, what number shot you have in your cartridge. He varies his distance according to these contingencies. Only, he has not as yet learned to gauge the greyhound: that dog is frequently kept for his benefit.

A special endowment of this immediate locality is a large and permanent sheet of water, three or four miles by

one, which bears, and deserves, the name of Eagle Lake. For, though overhung by no cliffs or lofty pines, it is far more the haunt of eagles, of both the bald and the gray species, than most tarns possessing those appendages of the romantic. Its dense fringe of fine trees, among them live-oaks a single one of which would make the fortune of an average city park, can well spare the Conifers. They are all hung with Spanish moss, a feature which conflicts with the impression of lack of moisture conveyed by the light ashen color of the bark and short annual growth of many of the smaller trees. Here and there tiny inlets are overhung with undergrowth which supplies a safe nesting-place to a multitude of birds of many kinds. The surface of the lake I have never seen free from ducks of one species or another, and generally of half a dozen. Almost the whole family, if we except the canvas-back and the red-head, visit it at one or another period. One item in their bill of fare is the nut of the water-lily, the receptacles of which, resembling the rose of a watering-pot, dot the shallows in great quantity. The green, cable-like roots of this plant are afloat, forming at some points heavy windrows. Some say they are torn up from the bottom by the alligators; but it is more probable that they are loosened and broken by the continual tugging of the divers. The alligators are not vegetarians, and they are not using their snouts much at this season. The young shoots of the *Nymphaea* are doubtless tempting food, as those of the *Vallisneria* are on the Chesapeake and the North Carolina sounds. Sustenance may be drawn also from the roots of the rushes and reeds which cover with their yellow stems and leaves many acres of the lake, and are thronged now by several species of small birds.

Hawks, of course, are always in sight, and that in astonishing variety, from the osprey down to two or three varieties of the sparrow-hawk. A monograph on the *Raptores* of Eagle Lake would be a most comprehensive work.

The osprey, notwithstanding the abundance of his scaly prey, is not common: probably the field is too limited for him. Ducks are the attraction of the other large species. In summer, ducks are rather secondary among the water-birds, the ibis, water-turkey, and flamingo imparting a tropical character to the scene that somewhat obscures the more familiar forms. There is even a survival here of birds that have nearly disappeared from the American fauna,—the paroquet, once so common in the Mississippi Valley as far north as the Ohio, being sometimes seen, and, if I mistake not, a second species of humming-bird straying north by way of Mexico.

From where we stand, under a canopy of rich green leaves, looking out upon the sunny water through a banian-like colonnade of mighty trunks and hanging vines, the pearly moss tempering the light like jealousies, summer seems but a relative idea. Fly-catchers flit back and forth, barn-swallows and sand-martins skim the lake, and an occasional splash or ripple at our feet shows that humbler life is getting astir. The highest life, or what modest man calls such, we have all to ourselves. Yet not quite; for there is visible yonder, beneath the outer tip of a live-oak which we have found to stretch and droop twenty-four paces from the seven-foot trunk, a little fleet of canoes. They belong to the pro-

fessional fisherman whose too tarry nets are quite an encumbrance for some yards of the sandy beach, and whose well may be noticed about a rifle-shot out from the shore. More than that, though Piscator is absent, some one is inspecting his boats. In fact,—and it *is simple fact*, and I am not smuggling in a bit of padding in the shape of sentiment,—two persons become perceptible, both with their backs towards us, now and studiedly all the time. One, a man, chooses a boat after trying several, and, with similar show of unavoidable delay, is cushioning the seats with carefully-arranged moss in four times the necessary quantity. During this absorbing process he rips one of his cuffs, or tears off a button from it, or smears it with the tar that besets the boat and its oars. This calamity supplies the lady, a neat young person, with a pretext for occupation, and she uses it to the fullest and most affectionate extent. It is growing late, and unless we relieve the couple of our obviously detected presence we shall deprive them of their Sunday-afternoon row. That it is a row with the stream we find ten days later, when their wedding becomes the sensation of the little village.

The old, old story! how pat it comes in! How could it have failed to come in, when the talk is of birds?

EDWARD C. BRUCE.

THE FERRYMAN'S FEE.

I.
“I AM going,” said the professor to his friend Miss Eldridge, “to marry a young woman whose mind I can mould.”

Somebody was uncharitable enough to say that he couldn't possibly make it any mouldier than his own. This was a slander. In the high dry Greek atmos-

phere which surrounded and enclosed his mind, mould, which requires dampness before it can exist, was an impossibility.

When an engagement is announced, it is almost invariably followed by one question, with a variable termination. The dear five hundred friends exclaim, with uplifted hands,—

